

SHERMAN BOIVIN

July 13, 1994

Dear Maxine:

Thank you for sending me the George Hobbie interview material. I worked for George for seven years, starting when I was in high school and continuing through the summer of 1940 when I left for Washington, D.C., having finished graduate school and had accepted an internship with the Federal Government through the National Institute of Public Affairs.

When I first started with the REX, I washed windows and did some of the window displays. After a bit, I waited on trade as a sales clerk. One summer, there was need for help in the plumbing shop, so I was a plumber's helper. The plumbers were Charles Seibel and Fred Jennings. There was another plumber there, too — Bridges. I also helped at that time a bit with the well drilling crew, loading and delivering casing to drilling sites.

I worked every Saturday, summer vacations, and Christmas vacations, and any other time I had from school. Pay, as I recall, was 30 cents per hour at the start, and 50 cents per hour at the end. I could save enough each summer to pay for one quarter tuition at Stanford — the other quarters were either scholarships or tuition notes.

In 1936 or 1937, George put in a photo counter, which I had quite a bit to do with. I think that this brought additional



traffic into the store.

Most kid jobs in the Santa Rosa area were related to prunes, apples, hops, or derived from these crops. In Petaluma, it was the poultry business in one way or another. My earliest experience was nailing together boxes for the shipping of broilers. The boxes were sized for birds of different weight, i.e., boxes for 2-pound chickens were larger than boxes for 1-1/2 pound birds. Little boards for the boxes were all pre-cut to exact dimensions, and as such were called "shook." They were made by the Frasier Box Factory, located between Petaluma Boulevard South and the Petaluma River, south of H Street. Frasier cut the "shook" out of clear spruce boards which came down from British Columbia via lumber schooner, like the "Napoma." There was no wharfage on that part of the river, just banks. The lumber was off-lifted by a crane on the vessel, and just dropped haphazardly on the bank.

The "shook" was packaged for ends, sides, and top and bottom. Each part was wired together for 25 boxes — that is, each wired bundle had sides for 25, a separate bundle for ends, and a separate bundle for tops and bottoms. The nailing bench was set up to hold the ends at the right spacing. Cement coated 3-penny nails were liberally dusted with cheap dusting powder and put in a gizmo called a stripper. One could take a strip of nails from the stripper between thumb and forefinger, and using a nailing hatchet, drive nails at a rapid rate. Pay was 2 or 3 cents each box.



Eggs were commercially packed into wooden boxes called egg cases. They were sized to accommodate 30 dozen eggs, 3 dozen to the flat, 15 flats to the side, the two sides separated by a wood partition. Nailing egg cases together required the ability to nail in the center partition "blind," and this required some skill. Pay for assembling egg cases was greater than for poultry boxes, but I can't recall the amount.

My earliest recollection is that the layers were separated by a piece of cardboard, with the eggs resting in a cardboard arrangement, which opened, provided separate space for each egg. These "things" were called fillers. Thus, empty egg cases provided egg "growers" included the right number of flats and fillers. The flats were at one time thin layers of excelsior, paper covered, manufactured by the Burrows Company, then located on G Street between 5th and 6th. Burrows was Willie Evans' grandfather, and was of the innovative breed of the late 19th century. All the machines used to manufacture these products were designed and made by him and his helpers. Later, the manufacturing operation was moved to the old shoe factory building across Wilson from the Silk Mill. The machines were weird combinations of gears, chains, levers, and eccentrics which made the whole building shake whenever operated. Not only did the factory produce items for the poultry business, they also produced pads for different kinds of fruit. In fact, they had a plant at Medford oriented to the fruit raised in that area (pears?).



Of course, someone came along with something better. A formed combination flat and filler was made by Mapes from paper maché, which became the standard, and is still used today.

In the spring of the year during some years, egg production exceeded demand, and the excess was put into cold storage. The eggs were dipped in warm mineral oil before storage, and when taken out of storage later (when prices were more favorable), had to be lightly sand blasted to remove the oil from the eggs.

I worked at all phases of these operations, including packing eggs for overseas shipment.

Chickens for meat were moved from the "ranches" to plants in town (there were several) where they were fed a rich diet for several days before they were killed, picked, and refrigerated. The birds were prepared New York style, which meant that they were not eviscerated. The bloody heads were wrapped in butcher paper and the birds chilled down before packing. All the meat end of the business was messy including the washing and drying of feathers. I never did any picking (unionized) or grading or packing, but I worked at about everything else.

Back to the years I worked at REX, and reference to the periodic experience of collecting past due accounts. This was very difficult for me because in most cases, I could see from the conditions of the ranch or home that things were tough, so to approach the housewife or man of the house and ask for payment on their bill wasn't easy. Most of the time I asked for any payment, which would express their intent to meet their



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obligation. Sometimes the wife would go to another room, bring out her purse, and give me two dollars, or maybe only 50 cents.

More on experience in the poultry business. I think that this was a job I had one summer after I was 14 years old, because it involved driving a truck (truck driver's license? What's that?). The company, Stewart & Murray, had a Reo flatbed truck which I would load with a number of empty egg cases in which were the appropriate number of "flats" and "fillers." I would go to chicken ranches on a set route, where I would pick up eggs — some whole case amounts, some on partial cases, issue a receipt, and off-load the number of empty cases to equal the number I took. The empties were loaded on the back end of the truck, and the cases with eggs would be loaded up near the back of the cab. The route included places near town, but out, too, to Penngrove, Cotati, and way points. The furthest was the Cunningham store on Gravenstein Highway. I certainly got to know all the back roads.

Well, Maxine, I think that I have covered "it." I will try to make notes on other things I recollect to pass on to you.

Incidentally, Bob Stimson and I are going to tape a session with Elly Van Bebber, George Hobbie, and Walt Roche on their experience when they were kids in Petaluma - 1920's.

Your endeavor here is much appreciated.

(Interviewer)

(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)



Sherman Boivin

as told during the program on The Great Depression, at the Petaluma Museum, July 16, 1989.

I worked for George Hobbe for seven years, washed windows, arranged displays, and so on. Then I was sent out to collect bills.

Population of Petaluma was about 8000. Construction was low. Everyone went to see a new house going up.

There were part-time jobs. Kids got jobs making boxes at 25 cents an hour. You were paid 2 or 3 cents each per box, made from beautiful cedar. There were jobs on the Russian River in the summer.

The New Deal gave us hope; there was an air of hope.

There was the three C's. Later anyone who had Three C's experience was an automatic candidate for non-commissioned officer in the army.

There was the NYA. At Jaycee I got a job teaching the lab part for the photography teacher, at 50 cents an hour.

There were WPA projects in town: on the sewers, on Wickersham Park, on Thompson Creek, and the draining of swamps.



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PLACE Santa Rosa, CA

DATE Sept 24, 1994

Sherman B. Brivin  
(Interviewee)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)



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Oral History Program  
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Bowin, Sherman Burns  
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 2200 Grace Dr.,  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

Marital status: Married ☒ Single ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐

Birthdate 3/2/16 Birthplace Petaluma, CA

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) lived elsewhere from 1940 - 1971

Education: Elementary school Petaluma

Secondary school Petaluma Grad 1934

College Santa Rosa Junior College 1937

Stanford University Grad 1939 BA

Stanford University 1940 MA

Other American University, Wash, D.C. 1940-41

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) Civil Service Federal 30 years, including last 15 years with Atomic Energy Commission - Administrative, financial, a general manager. Includes 4 1/2 years military.

Travels U.S., British Isles, Europe, Japan, Canada, Alaska.

Organizations, clubs Retired Officers Association, Sons of the American Revolution, Sonoma County Historical Society, S.R.S.C. alumni Assoc., Stanford University alumni Assoc., E. Clampus Vitus, Sonoma County Genealogical Society,  
Other special interests Photography, antique furniture,

Additional comments

THANK YOU!



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Family History Questionnaire

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Birthdate</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>	<u>Deceased? Date</u>
<u>Parents*</u>	Emile Peter Borim	5/22/88	Sacramento	11/26/16
	Ebrie Viola Burns	12/30/84	Petaluma	2/1/73

Brothers & Sisters

- none -

Grand-  
parents\*

	August Borim	8/13/46	France	5/4/16
	Adriett		France	
	Charles S. Burns	4/13/57	Clinton, ME	9/7/12
	Ida Jane Sherman	2/2/61	Clarendon, Mich.	2/8/53
	① Louise C. Payne	10/16/19	Tempe, AZ	7/19/49
<u>Spouse</u>	② Phoebe L. Barnes	12/26/18	SF, CA	

Children

	Sharon B. Fikse	5/30/43	LA, CA
	Nancy C. Vala	3/22/46	Phoenix, AZ
	Alan S. Borim	5/22/49	LA, CA

step  
daughter

Grandchildren

	Sharon John Roupaz
	Eric Roupaz
<u>Grand</u>	Erika Vala
	Jessica Vala
<u>Alan</u>	Kyle Borim
	Nicole Borim

\*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!